

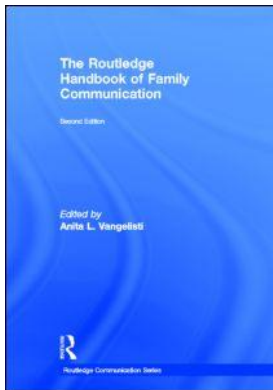
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The Family of the Future

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Part VII

Epilogue and Commentary

The Family of the Future

What Do We Face?

Kathleen M. Galvin

At the close of the 20th century, organizational development specialist Peter Vaill (1996) asserted that living in a world of “permanent white water,” a complex, turbulent, competitive environment, necessitates lifelong learning. Fourteen years later he re-emphasized the ongoing need to manage surprising, novel, and obtrusive events (Vaill, Bunker & Santana, 2010). Twenty-first century family communication scholarship represents a shift from an early, extensive focus on marital interaction to a broad range of research questions. The rapidly evolving nature of families and their environments challenge communication scholars to continually explore new directions.

Relying on a slight variation of the framework printed in the handbook edition (2004), this chapter will update selected material, explore cutting edge family interaction research and provide informed speculation regarding future scholarship.

The family of the future will:

- 1 Reflect an increasing diversity of self-conceptions, evidenced through structural as well as cultural variations, that will challenge current family scholars to abandon their historical, nucleocentric biases, unitary cultural assumptions, and implied economic and religious assumptions.
- 2 Live increasingly within four and five generations of familial connection. Escalating longevity and changing birth rates will necessitate greater attention to developmental patterns of infants through centenarians, with a strong focus on patterns of multiple intergenerational contacts, generational reversals, and influence patterns within smaller families.
- 3 Function in a world of somatic concerns—influenced by health-related genetic discoveries and fast-paced medical advances. In earlier decades family studies foregrounded relational interactions while minimizing the focus on individuals. Breakthroughs in areas such as genetics and illness will necessitate greater understanding of individuals embedded within family systems.
- 4 Encounter rapidly changing environments due to unprecedented technological change. Family members will be faced with new issues and interaction patterns resulting from technological changes in areas such as telecommunications, medical

treatment, and education. These changes must be viewed through dual life course and developmental lenses.

- 5 Require new and innovative ways to protect and enhance family life, that specifically address the needs of multi-problem families and evolving family forms through the development of targeted intervention and prevention strategies. This necessitates attending to the role communication in supporting family resilience and family enrichment.

Each of the previous assertions, reflecting a “permanent white water” environment, continues to have significant implications for the future study of family interaction.

Family Conceptions

Increasingly families will define themselves through their interactions; communicative definitions of family are privileged over structural definitions (Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999). As families become more diverse, “their definitional processes expand exponentially, rendering their identity highly discourse dependent” (Galvin, 2006, p. 3). Thus communicative strategies manage external boundaries as well as internal family boundaries. Members need to explain or defend their family identity to outsiders and reinforce their family identity through narratives or discussion among insiders. As the concept of voluntary kin develops (Braithwaite et al., 2010) and conceptualizations of the family expand (Edwards & Graham, 2009), the concept of family is further problematized.

Structural Variations

Families no longer can be usefully categorized in unitary terms, such as blended, single parent, or adoptive, due to overlapping complexities of connection. Various family structures remain understudied from a communication perspective, although some scholars have addressed communication and the intentional family building processes of families formed through transracial/transnational adoption (Docan-Morgan, 2010, Harigan, 2010). The growth of open adoption and same-sex partner adoption represent this change (Farr & Patterson, 2009) even as these categories display overlapping complexities. Few communication-oriented studies of the following family forms exist: foster parents (Patrick & Palladino, 2009), in-laws (Morr Serewicz, 2008; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009), and families with bisexual and transgendered members (Bilbarz & Savci, 2010).

Ethnic Variations

The nature of most marital research led to the claim that “The psychology of marriage as it exists is really a psychology of European American middle class marriage” (Flanagan et al., 2002, p. 109). Gudykunst and Lee (2001) called for studies “on identities and family communication among non-European American families that can be used to generate predictions for future research” (p. 80).

At the turn of the century a few scholars had explored competencies developed within African American families to prepare members for communicatively managing boundary issues and addressed the socialization of African American children through parental warnings about racial dangers and disappointments as well as fostering the development of communicative coping mechanisms for confronting discrimination.

Calls for research on preparing children to confront racial derogation (Daniel & Daniel, 1999; Ferguson, 1999) remain unheeded.

Future categorization of family race/ethnicity will change as marriage, adoption, and cohabitation increase the population of mixed ethnicity families. Interracial/interethnic marriages continue to rise, accounting for 14.6 percent marriages in 2008 (Passel, Wang & Taylor, 2010). Their gender patterns vary; 22 percent of all black male newlyweds and 9 percent of black female newlyweds marry outside their race. Some parents encounter confounding issues such as interactions with extended family members who love the child but refuse to acknowledge any biracial features (Root, 1999). Fortunately multi-racial/ethnic families are receiving increasing attention from communication scholars (Soliz, Thorson, & Rittenour, 2009). Although research focused on families of color has increased, communication practices in Asian and East Asian families and Hispanic/Latino families have received limited attention.

The Hispanic population reached 15.4 percent (American Community Survey, 2008) and Hispanic children are projected to reach 30 percent of all children by 2025 (Fry & Passel, 2009).¹ The majority of Latino children in the U.S.A. are “second generation” U.S. born children, while 37 percent are third generation or higher (Fry, 2009). In 2007, 34.5 million U.S. residents reported Spanish as the most commonly spoken language at home (Shin & Kominski, 2010). Many immigrants must overcome language barriers and adapt to new discourse patterns (Langdon 2009).

Characterized by *familism*, Hispanic families place family at the center of life, reflecting the influence of Catholicism and powerful intergenerational and extended family ties and maternal values (Clauss-Ehlers, 2007). Strong marriages are characterized by children, communication, and religion (Skogrand, Hatch, & Singh, 2008).

Mexicans’ staggered pattern of immigration creates gender role challenges (Bush, Bohon, & Kim, 2010). Fathers usually migrate first, leaving mothers to function as single parents with relatives’ support. Reunification necessitates role and relational reorganization, often traumatic for children (Glick, 2010). Extended family members provide nurturing, children’s discipline, companionship, financial support, and problem solving (Falicov, 2005). Parents rely on indirect, implicit communication, consonant with Mexicans’ focus on family harmony. Whereas positive emotional expressiveness is valued, assertiveness and open disagreement are discouraged.

Latino parents, especially those of Mexican origin, report less extensive parental communication about sexual issues than those of non-Mexican origins (Raffaelli & Green, 2003). Only 38 percent of immigrant youths reported discussing sex with their parents, compared to 63 percent for those in the second and third generation (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Given the growing Hispanic population, more family communication practices require scholarly attention.

Economic Variations

Although money can reflect family interpersonal dynamics (Jellinek & Beresin, 2008), family communication scholarship assumes a level of financial security. Recent economic reversals contributed to diminished family relational quality and disruption (Bartholomae & Fox, 2010). When families face economic reversals, conversation topics include closing out credit cards or living without health insurance (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). Unemployment necessitates challenging conversations such as renegotiating breadwinner roles or work patterns thereby increasing emotional stress

(Gudmunson, Beutler, Israelsen, McCoy, & Hill, 2007). The strong association between economic pressure and emotional distress affects even supportive couples (Conger, Rueter, & Elder, 1999). Serious financial strain increases the incidence of couple's disagreements while decreasing couple's time together (Gudmunson et al., 2007). When facing ongoing financial stress, members benefit from learning communicative coping strategies (Wadsworth & Santiago, 2008). Little is known about financial conversations between middle aged adults and their parents, or parents and their young children.

In any economic climate, discussing family finances remains a critical communication task. Financial negotiations occur when adding a child, funding a college education, or supporting returning adult offspring. Work–family interaction research emphasizes links between economic pressures and family decision making; most work/family discussions involve financial considerations (Waite & Nielsen, 2001). Selected communication theories have the potential to contribute to understanding parent–child interactions about consumer finance (Allen, 2008).

Cultural variations in financial management impact couples. Collectivistic cultures view money as an extended family resource thereby creating conflict in multiethnic partnerships (Lincoln, 2007). Wealthy families experience unique needs for communication-related attention. Little is known about the “have/have not” divide's pressures on poor families and their communication patterns. Familial financial communication remains significantly understudied.

Religious/Spiritual/Sanctification Variations

Family researchers seldom address religion (Parke, 2001) even as U.S. religious affiliation is shifting. The PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life (2008) suggests significant changes in religious identification: 23.9 percent identify themselves as Catholic, 51 percent, Protestant, and 16 percent, no affiliation; spousal religious affiliation differs in 37 percent of couples. Although scholars argue that religion has the potential to help couples build marital intimacy and stimulate companionship (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007), few communication scholars address this area.

Religious affiliation impacts partner interactions, parenting styles, gender roles, and family/work decisions. Christian parents, primarily mothers, report discussing religious topics with children more than five times weekly (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). Parental public religiosity curbs the frequency of family conversations about sex and birth control (Regnerus, 2005). A meta-analytic review of links between religion, marriage, and parenting revealed some evidence linking religiousness with greater use of adaptive communication skills, collaboration in handling disagreements, positivity in family relationships, and parental coping (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). These researchers found an inverse relationship between religion and domestic violence or marital verbal conflict. Recent research emphasizes spirituality and *sanctification* or the process whereby “[a]n aspect of life is perceived as having divine character and significance” (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005, p. 228). The rise of sanctification and the growth of non-institutional religious worship create opportunities for family communication researchers

Interfaith couples experience more communication challenges than same-faith couples. Frequently they face conflicts moving toward marriage or encounter disagreements due to the lack of a shared religious social network. When partners with different religious orientations disagree over religious issues they are vulnerable to some types of demand–withdraw conflict patterns (Hughes & Dickson, 2006).

Finally, non-Western faith traditions remain a fertile field for family communication research. Understanding the influence of Islam, in which marriage is a family affair (Abudabbeh, 2005), would expand knowledge of families that value intensely emotional intimate relationships and strong identification with the reputation and honor of the family (Daneshpour, 1998). Taken together, the aforementioned points depict the varied conception of families and the evolving complexities impacting family members' interaction patterns.

Life Course and Evaluations

A futuristic perspective requires exploring developmental patterns within individual, generational, and historical time. A life course approach focuses on "how varying events and their timing in the lives of individuals affected families in particular historical contexts" (Aldous, 1990, p. 573). It recognizes that lives are influenced by changing contextual features such as poverty, race relations, or technological advances. Unique individual experiences may occur "off time" or "on time." Given current medical and technological advances, women may bear children "off time" in their 50s and the rural elderly may finish high school "off time" through online studies. Historical life course issues involve recognizing the impact of shared group experiences (Civil Rights Movement, September 11, 2001, Gulf of Mexico oil spill) on family development. Personal, unusual experiences, such as surviving a plane crash or losing both legs in battle, contribute to an individual's life course while also affecting other family members. Couples choosing to remain voluntarily child-free engage in unique intra-dyadic communication processes (Durham & Braithwaite, 2009). Family developmental stages must be framed within a life course context.

Increasingly, more families will experience four and five generations. Lifespan predictions for U.S. children are 78.9 years for those born in 2015 (males 76.4; females, 81.4) (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 2009). Researchers need to include great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents in studies of family interaction. Intergenerational issues will be easier to research in real life rather than through retrospective analyses. Due to increasing longevity and decreasing fertility, the population age structure in industrialized nations is shifting from a pyramid to an elongated rectangle, leaving older generations competing for connection to fewer grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Bengston, 2001). Increasingly communication scholars are focusing on grandparent-grandchild relationships (Soliz & Harwood, 2006; Fowler & Soliz, 2010) and step-grandparents (Soliz, 2007). Communication researchers need to address multiple elder roles, such as great-grandparents or great uncles and aunts. Multigenerational relationships in families with gay, lesbian, and transgendered members, cohabiting partners, never-married parents, and multicultural patterns require scholarly attention. Although communication research addresses multigenerational transmissions of family culture, usually from a downward influence model, few studies address bi-directional influences, especially across multiple generations (Saphir & Chaffee, 2002). Power and knowledge reversals impact families as youngsters develop technological skills and cultural knowledge unavailable to older family members (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

When immigrant adults lack English language fluency, an older child, frequently female, assumes the role of family language broker by translating, interpreting and occasionally mediating elders' interactions (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Starting about ages 8–12, children translate or interpret face-to-face interactions, transactions, forms,

letters, and other materials (Weisskirch, 2006). Frequently this responsibility carries into adulthood.

Consequences of assuming this role vary. Benefits include a greater level of acculturation, higher academic achievement, increased self-confidence and expanded English facility (Trickett & Jones, 2007). Stronger bonds develop with parents (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Children experience an adult world by translating in medical settings, social security offices, or school conferences, serving parents and other relatives. However, costs include feeling embarrassed or overwhelmed by multiple demands as well as pressure to assume an adult role (Morales & Hanson, 2005). Some children worry about family finances or relatives' health, concerns they learn through translating. Language brokers may withhold information or selectively choose an appropriate response among competing options (Weisskirch, 2006).

Perceptions of this role vary. When asked to report their feelings, Mexican American college students' responses ranged from helpful, proud and useful, to ashamed, embarrassed and guilty (Weisskirch, 2006). More Anglo-oriented respondents reported greater difficulty with family relations and feeling forced to translate, whereas more Latino-oriented respondents reported more positive experiences. Little is known about how this role impacts relationships and interaction patterns. For example, higher amounts of Vietnamese teenage brokering were related to increased adolescent reports of family conflict, but higher levels of family adaptability (Trickett & Jones, 2007). Privacy management, message manipulation, conflict management, sibling interaction patterns and role negotiation in these families require scholarly attention.

Somatic Concerns

Historically many factors limited family communication scholars from incorporating biology into empirical studies but future research will reflect a strong biophysiological perspective (Floyd & Afifi, 2011). Traditionally family communication research foregrounded relational interaction while minimizing an individual focus. However, as incorporating physiological state gains prominence in psychology, more communication scholars will incorporate these data in relational studies. Recent research addresses the impact of family members' physiological state on interactional processes such as intimacy, conflict, or problem solving (Afifi, Afifi, Morse & Hamrick, 2008; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2009, Floyd & Afifi, 2011). The current focus on the impact of physiology, genetics, and evolution on interaction patterns emerged from renewed attention to biological contributions to individual communication practices and discussions of a communibiological paradigm (Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001).

Growing evidence links psychological processes to physical health. For example, writing about personal topics influences measures of physical and mental health. According to Pennebaker and Chung (in press), "When individuals write or talk about personally upsetting experiences in the laboratory, consistent and significant health improvements are found" (p. 13). Family health communication involves: (a) the day-to-day health-related talk that affects members' interactions, choices, behaviors, and expectations; (b) members' interaction about health surrounding a particular illness; (c) the meaning of health and illness for members, particularly within the family's cultural or religious tradition; and (d) discussion of familial genetic history.

Valuable research models exist for understanding everyday health-related family conversations including issues such as the link between rule-related conversations and

current offspring behavior or the impact of parental encouragement of health-promoting behaviors such as exercise or sun protection (Bylund, Baxter, Imes, & Wolf, 2010). A member with a chronic illness impacts family members' interaction with each other and extended family members. Smith & Soliday's (2001) study of the effects of parental chronic kidney disease on the family reveals an impact on: time together, quality of joint activities, and worries that create stress for all members. These impact immediate family members' interactions, as well as interactions with relatives and friends. Increasingly research links marriage with better health. Waite and Gallagher (2000) reported that marriage protects health, while Carr and Springer (2010) found "The protective effects of marriage for self-rated health, chronic conditions, functional limitations, and mortality were comparable across all income and age groups" (p. 749). Unhappy marriages do not produce such benefits. Communication-related marital health benefits involve having one spouse, usually the woman, who monitors both persons' health and nags the partner to engage in desirable health practices, and having a spouse with whom to discuss one's troubles. Weaker health benefits for cohabiting partners vary by gender and life course stage due to poorer relational quality, greater instability, and social selection (Carr & Springer, 2010). Future research needs to explore the health-related communication behaviors of cohabiting and same-sex partnerships. Other health-related concerns involve family members with a disability (Braithwaite & Thompson, 2000; Canary, 2008) or an addiction. Currently few family communication scholars are advancing these areas.

Personalized or predictive medicine, resulting from genome mapping, facilitates family discussion of heredity and its health implications. The impact of genetic advances depends heavily on whether family members talk about their genetic heritage since "The best genetic test is often family history. But that requires us to both know and tell" (Parrott, 2009, p. 149). Established family communication patterns and rules "influence and are influenced by the presence of a genetic condition or inherited health risk in a family" (Gaff & Bylund, 2010, p. xvii). Members need to disclose and discuss genetic conditions and recognize the problematic impact of withholding such information from relatives. Communication issues include enacting disclosure strategies, coping with the relatives' reactions, and continuing the conversations over years. Factors that impact disclosure include family structure, roles, gender, privacy rules, culture, timing, practical ethics and scientific knowledge; factors that affect ongoing discussion include family communication patterns, gender differences, and the disease's potential impact (Galvin & Grill, 2009). Research needs to address facilitating discussion about predictive genetic testing to increase the number of informed at-risk family members (Gaff, Collins, Symes & Halliday, 2005) as well as managing discussions over time and across generations.

Multiple family communication theories have the potential to influence research on initial disclosure and ongoing interactions. Researchers may examine how societal master narratives impact the construction of narrative frames or the process of framing a diagnosis (Trees, Koenig Kellas & Roche, 2010), or how members engage in privacy management to reveal or conceal genetic information (Petronio & Gaff, 2010). Future research should "inform the development of theoretically and empirically based practice to foster 'good' communication" (Gaff et al., 2007, p. 1).

Technological Advances

Multiple life course issues confront family members. Selected technological changes will serve as exemplars for countless technological developments impacting families.

Reproductive Technologies

Reproductive technologies provide biological parenthood to many who previously could not achieve it. Infertility impacts communication privacy management as women tend to experience shifting privacy boundaries over time when addressing this with others (Bute & Vik, 2010). When sperm or egg donors are involved in conception, parents face communication challenges related to decision making regarding technological assistance and eventual explanation to their children. Deciding to use reproductive technologies to conceive involves complicated conversations between partners and decisions about when and to whom this decision is revealed. Many parents report no plans to tell their children. In their study of the association between young adult offspring's perceptions of their parents' use of topic avoidance to maintain secrecy and family functioning, Paul and Berger (2007) found an inverse relationship between topic avoidance regarding donor assisted conception and family functioning. They concluded that use of donor conception should be shared with offspring and that parents should disclose the information jointly. Such technological issues raise critical communication issues of family privacy, parental infertility, and children's rights to genetic information. A study of 485 adults conceived through sperm donation revealed young adults experienced "profound struggles" with their origins and identities, although most affirmed a right to know the truth about their background (Marquardt, Glenn & Clark, 2010). Discussions may differ between two parent heterosexual couples and single women and lesbian mothers because the latter groups may confront the issues earlier when small children ask "Have I got a Daddy?" (Montuschi, 2006).

Media Technologies

The interface of family interactions and new technologies remains a critical research area. Of particular interest is how the Internet impacts the hierarchical communication structure as youngsters gain information and skills unfamiliar to their parents. The child's information power may create a generational reversal fraught with stress. Americans are more likely to construct discussion networks involving people from different, non-familial, backgrounds; Internet users are 38 percent less likely to rely exclusively on their spouses or partners as discussion confidants (Hampton, Sessions, Her, & Rainie, 2009). Many family members create family websites, research family history, share family photos or health-related news, and sustain relationships with extended family members; these practices remain understudied. Increasingly, older relatives send requests to "friend" younger relatives, not always a welcome message.

Individuals may be categorized as Digital Natives, or younger people continuously connected by technology who think and process information differently from previous generations, and Digital Settlers or Digital Immigrants, older persons who vary in their sophistication in use of technology but who also rely, heavily to slightly, on digital technology (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). When adults discuss and monitor their children's online experiences, their offspring are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as disclosing personal information or meeting up offline with online acquaintances. When parents are unprepared to discuss online experiences, such conversations do not occur (Palfrey & Gasser 2008).

Livingston & Helsper's (2008) study of parental mediation examined parental attempts to regulate their children's media use in order to maximize the advantages of the online environment by using strategies such as rule-making, restrictions, co-viewing,

or co-using. They found that two-thirds of parents reported discussing Internet use with their children; almost half watched the computer screen and about a third remained physically close when a child is online.

Internet dangers include cyber-bullying and sexting, online communication practices not understood by some parents. Cyber-bullying includes harassment or posting false rumors (Whitaker & Bushman, 2009). In their study of 2000 middle school students Hinduja and Patchin (2009) reported that 20 percent of respondents indicated seriously thinking about attempting suicide; cyber-bullying victims were almost twice as likely to have attempted or considered suicide compared to youth who had not experienced cyber-bullying. Some adolescents engage in “sexting,” or sending text messages with pictures of children or teens who are naked or engaged in sexual acts (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009). Sexting creates serious problems for adolescents and their families, resulting in emotional pain, thoughts of suicide, and serious legal consequences. An online study of 1,247 respondents ages 14–24 reported that that three in ten young people have been involved in some type of naked texting; one in ten shared a naked image of themselves, and 29 percent reported receiving messages with sexual words or images through texting or on the Internet (A Thin Line, 2009). Few parents hold conversations about dangerous online behavior, leaving their children vulnerable. In some cases, older siblings or cousins go online to see what a younger relative is doing (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). More research needs to assess the extent to which parents communicate about Internet dangers and the nature of those conversations. The Internet serves as an exemplar for other major technological innovations such as PDAs, cell phones, or videogames that have implications for family interaction.

Gerentechnology addresses issues regarding communication between elderly persons and their family members using digital-age assistive information and communication technologies that allow older individuals to maintain independence and improve mental health through behavior monitoring and maintaining connections to outside support networks (Blaschke, Freddolino & Mullen, 2009). Gerentechnology affects family communication by supporting the well-being of older members while reducing their isolation. For example, household sensors inform geographically distant adult children that the medicine cabinet and refrigerator doors have been opened indicating their father took his medicine and ate lunch. Webcams support intergenerational discussions of baseball scores or parental health. Such technology delays, or compensates for, the declines of aging while enhancing family interaction (Fozard, Rietsema, Bouma, & Graafmans, 2000). Although such gerontology advances attempt to keep relationships co-equal, monitoring involves role reversal, guilt, and occasional deception (Stout, 2010). Successful elder adaptation depends on ongoing parent–adult child discussion of issues. Research needs to address communicative processes by which such transitions occur and the ongoing impact of this mediated communication.

Family Lifestyles: Stress and Intervention/Prevention

Future families will need innovative ways to protect and improve members’ lives congruent with a range of family forms and high stress circumstances. Life stresses, such as coping when a soldier returns from battle with devastating injuries, or maintaining family identity in a homeless shelter, present significant communication challenges.

Familial resilience, manifested through highly functional communication, undergirds stress management. Resilience, the process of “reintegrating from disruptions in life”

(Richardson, 2002, p. 309), remains understudied from a communication perspective. Interventions to support family resilience include attempts to identify “key interactional processes that enable families to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges” (Walsh, 2006, p. 3). Intervention efforts with families experiencing severe stresses aim to increase “members’ abilities to clarify their crisis situation, to express and respond to each other’s needs and concerns, and to negotiate system changes that meet new demands” (Walsh, 2006, p. 107). Communication processes involved in human resilience involve: “(a) crafting normalcy, (b) affirming identity anchors, (c) maintaining and using communication networks, (d) putting alternative logics to work, and (e) downplaying negative feelings while foregrounding positive emotions” (Buzanell, 2010, p. 1).

Severe economic pressures, usually accompanied by concerns for physical space, safety, and employment, undermine partner, and parent–child interaction. Children living in poverty are more likely to suffer depression, social withdrawal and low self-esteem, all of which have implications for family interaction (Seccombe, 2000). Family life is compounded by unsafe neighborhoods, leaving many mothers depressed and children witnessing violence. Yet data from over 100,000 families revealed that routines and relationships enrich poor families; 73 percent of parents in poor families reported they can share ideas and talk well with their children, a finding quite similar to those in other income brackets (Valladares & Anderson Moore, 2009).

Intervention programs targeted at specific family issues produce limited benefits when they overlook how parents, children, and society connect within various community contexts and networks (Socha & Stamp, 2009). An ecological perspective necessitates understanding external social capital or “the extent to which the family system is embedded in an integrative network of people and institutions in the community that share common values” (Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000, p. 121). Traditionally many studies of poor and urban communities focused on community deficiencies and problems, overlooking capacity-focused development. An asset-based and relationship driven strategy focuses on community strengths while rebuilding the relationships between and among local residents, associations and institutions (Kretzmann, McKnight, Dobrowolski & Puntteney, 2005).

When families experience breakdowns resulting from internal rather than external factors, communication knowledge and skills remain central features of enrichment and therapeutic approaches. Prevention and intervention efforts remain overlooked and under-researched from a communication perspective. The recent focus on positive aspects of marriage including trust, empathic forgiveness, social support, commitment, teamwork, and sacrifice (Flanagan, et al., 2002), reflects little involvement of communication scholars who need to be incorporated into communication-focused enrichment programs. Specific resilience-related communication skills include clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem solving (Walsh, 2006).

Governmental initiatives have created online supports for marriage, including The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, a clearinghouse of information and resources on healthy marriages including marital education and enrichment programs (Stanley, Markman, & Jenkins, 2008). It includes some additional resources for other family forms and culturally diverse and disadvantaged populations. Little communication scholarship appears among these outreach efforts.

Future research programs need to address the role of family communication in the management of devastating stresses and development of familial resilience. Family researchers must find ways to contribute to the revitalized area of marital and family

enrichment through communication skills training and the development of family-focused prevention programs through communication-oriented research programs.

Conclusion

Family communication research matured dramatically over the past two decades. In order to increase its impact, more communication scholars need to partner with researchers in other disciplines such as economics, education, health, law, psychology or technology to incorporate other perspectives, address problems of greater magnitude and investigate family interactions within varying contexts.

The multiple research directions identified within this handbook are vast and complex. Yet family members will discover that Vaill's (1996) "permanent white water" predictions of the future continue to be accurate—turbulence is woven through all areas of relational life—and unanticipated circumstances and concerns will emerge with each passing year. Family communication scholars must recognize that avoiding the turbulent rapids is impossible. Surviving and thriving in permanent white water depends on more than individual skill and effort; it requires the concentrated efforts of ongoing research teams committed to long-term research programs. Both family members and family scholars need to develop the ability to forecast the upcoming swirling currents while negotiating the immediate ones. It continues to be a challenging ride!

Note

- 1 The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are contested and will be used interchangeably.

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